

Competition Events – At A Glance

An Introduction to Duo Interpretation (DUO)



Event Description

Two competitors team up to deliver a ten-minute performance of a published play or story. Using off-stage focus, Duo Interpretation competitors convey emotion and environment through a variety of performance techniques focusing on the relationships and interactions between the characters. No props or costumes are used. Performances may also include an introduction written by the students to contextualize the performance and state the title and author.

Considerations for Selecting Duo Literature

When looking at literature, a Duo entry must consider how the literature would work for both members of the team. Duo Interpretation strives for a balanced performance with both partners being integral to the development of the piece's characters, relationships, plot, and more. Duo Interpretation allows for students to do humorous, dramatic, or pieces that combine both into the performance. Considerations for selecting a topic for a Duo Interpretation should include age, maturity, and school standards.

Traits of Successful Duo Performers

When considering what event you should choose, or which direction to point a student when selecting an event, below are some general traits of successful Duo students to keep in mind:

- Combination of comedic and dramatic skills
- Enthusiasm for choreography
- Strong listening skills
- Willingness to co-create
- Flexibility

Examples of Past Duo Titles

- *25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* by Rachel Sheinkin
- *Complete Works of William Shakespeare Abridged* by Adam Long, Daniel Singer, and Jess Winfield
- *Expecting Isabel* by Lisa Loomer
- *I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change* by Joe DiPietro and Jimmy Roberts
- *Little Shop of Horrors* by Howard Ashman
- *Peter Pan* by J.M. Barrie
- *Regina Flector Wins the Science Fair* by Marco Ramirez
- *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* by Frank McGuinness
- *The Crayon Map* by Oliver Leslie and Christopher Marianetti
- *Year One* by Harold Ramis, Gene Stupnitsky, and Lee Eisenberg

Learn More! The National Speech & Debate Association is the leading provider of competitive and educational resources to aid students and coaches as they explore our competitive events. For Duo Interpretation, we provide a number of helpful resources—including live and recorded webinars designed to introduce foundational and advanced concepts in Interp; access to Duo final round videos; an interpretation textbook for Resource Package subscribers; videos from champion coaches; and much more! Take advantage of the amazing benefits of being a member by using our resources to help advance yourself in competitive speech and debate activities. Visit www.speechanddebate.org for more information.

Find Your Voice

Duo Interpretation is an excellent crash course on creativity. The process of cutting, blocking, and refining a script really encourages young artists to think differently and create form and empty space. I think the best part of Duo was the opportunity to meet so many talented, creative people who turn words on a page into phenomenal showcases of artistry, and to have the ability to do it all with my best friend.” — **Zach Snow, Association Alum**

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Basic Understandings

Duo. The event everyone wants to do with a best friend. In truth, while the appeal of duo might be performing with a friend, this approach may not be best. Duo is about balance. Partners need to compliment one another stylistically, have a similar skill set and work ethic. Chemistry is an important element of duo, but chemistry outside of a practice/performance setting does not always translate to chemistry when practicing or performing at a tournament. Be sure to share your goals with your coach as they help you through the process of getting started in duo.

Duo is an event that can be dramatic, comedic, or a combination of the two. With a ten minute time cap, and a requirement of an off-stage focus, Duo is one of the most unique forms of performance. The main objective is to maintain a sense of balance between performers that focuses on the relationship(s) between the characters they create.



Research

There are two ways to go about finding a script: You can either let the choice of partner influence the material you want to perform, or let the selection determine the ideal partner.

Go to your local library, visit the bookstore, check out children's stories, or search for plays with two or more characters. Look for a simple story told in a simple way.

Complex plots are hard to follow, especially if there are more than two characters in the selection. Remember: you have ten minutes to tell a story. Don't pick anything too abstract or complicated.

Keep in mind that each partner should be assigned to a specific character(s), and that you should not switch between characters throughout the performance.

Know the strengths and weaknesses of the team. If the piece requires a lot of physical tech, or vocal variance, and a partner struggles with this, it might not be the best idea to choose that selection.

Finally, it's always a good idea to watch the latest duo rounds. Duo is an incredibly diverse event. Watch a final round to get a feel for the stylistic differences that are found throughout the event.

Structural Components

Structure of an Interp (taken from *Interpretation of Literature, Bringing Words to Life*).

TEASER • 0:00 – 1:30

Previews the topic and mood of the selection

INTRO • 1:30 – 3:00

Explains the purpose of the performance

EXPOSITION • 3:00 – 3:30

Introduces characters and setting

INCITING INCIDENT • 3:30 – 4:00

Sends the conflict into motion

RISING ACTION • 4:00 – 7:30

Complicates the conflict

CLIMAX • 7:30 – 8:30

Emotional peak of the performance

FALLING ACTION • 8:30 – 9:30

Resolves the conflict

Cutting. This is the parts of the selection you've chosen to perform. Having a solid cutting is incredibly important because it influences every performative choice you make. It should dictate characterization, motivation, blocking, and relational tensions.

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Characterization. All interpretation events require that strong character choices are made. Distinct physical, vocal, and emotional choices should be made for each character.

Relationship. This is probably the biggest component of an effective duo. The duo should focus on the relationship between the characters. There should be a constant push and pull as the characters fight for power in the relationship. The approach can be humorous or dramatic in nature, but there should be defined goals for the performance, and each scene within that performance. Discuss the motivation for each character and set objectives for the message to convey in each scene and how the audience should feel.

Blocking. Duo can be the most visually stunning of interpretation events because when you've got double the performers, there is double the potential for creative blocking choices. Blocking is how the characters move within the imagined space you've created for them. Make sure the blocking creates the imagined space the characters exist in (i.e. a spaceship, or an office), and the emotional state of the characters (i.e. standing farther apart to symbolize emotional distance, or turning inward during an intimate conversation).

Intro. An introduction explains the purpose of the performance. Typically, each duo partner takes a turn explaining the justification for the performance. Competitors usually close the intro by giving the title and author before continuing with the performance.



Organizing

When you cut a duo, make sure partners agree on the objective of the story. Establish what the climax should be, and from there, construct the story leading up to it. Make sure that the lines are balanced, and remove redundant lines, or chunks of the story that are not integral to the plot of the cutting. Consider what the visual representation of the piece will look like, taking into account that duo is meant to be performed with an off stage focus. Denote in the cutting changes in pace, where to take beats (pauses), and important blocking moments. Partners need to discuss why the characters are doing what they're doing.

Standing it Up/Practicing

Often, if the appropriate amount of time was spent reading, cutting, and analyzing a script, memorization will be easier. However, it can still be a challenge. Here are things to keep in mind:

First, brains are a muscle. The more time a person practices memorizing, or simply memorize things, the better s/he become. Memorizing is a process.

Next, memorization is physical. Sitting down staring at a script, re-reading the lines will not be beneficial. Memorize the script with the intent to perform it. Type up a clean version with only finalized text and blocking. Then, tape it to the wall to actively memorize. Read the lines aloud moving with them as indicated by the cutting. Partners should be in front of a mirror, so they can evaluate the effectiveness of their movements. This is particularly important in duo because "clean" blocking, or blocking that is defined, motivated, and executed with precision, will factor into the rank in the round. It is helpful to memorize a scene at a time, building off of the previous scene. Partners need to remember that a character is responding to what a character said before. Conceptualize the lines as a conversation to help memorization.

Because Duo is a dialogue heavy, relationship focused performance, it's important for the characters to listen and react to each other. Notice how friends engage with each other when they talk. Facial reactions, gestures, and other nonverbal response are a huge part of

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communication. Make sure that each character is engaged in the performance, even when they aren't speaking. Having well thought out, motivated reactions can bring a Duo to the next level.

Once memorized, the duo students and their coach can then build off of the choices that've been made for characters. Adjustments to blocking, characterization, and line delivery can be made.



Performance Tips

It may sound cliché, but confidence is key! If the legwork has been put in, confidence is a natural product. Competitors should walk into that round with heads held high, ready to show the world what they've got! Trust what has been created. Do what was practiced, and if feeling compelled to "try something new," the coach should be consulted. Consistency is key. It's hard to evaluate what to change in practice if the performance in the round is completely different than what was worked on for the past few weeks.

Pay attention to other performers. Smile, and be a warm, inviting audience member. Partners should not conspire with each other during the round! If there's something they need to tell each other, it can be said after the round in private. There is nothing worse than getting

up to perform and having an audience that either stone faces you, won't look you in the eye, or is clearly more concerned about talking to their partner than paying attention to the performance. Think of it this way: each round is about 60 minutes. Ten of those involve a duo performing, the other 50 are for your duo to listen, learn, and support your fellow competitors.

Keep a notebook for between rounds. Sometimes, another person's performance will be inspirational, and it's a good idea to have a notebook handy to write down new ideas. It's also nice to know who your duo competed against in each round. A duo should review their ballots after the tournament, and then they can go back through their notebook and compare their ballots to their notes.

Between rounds, duo students should figure out what room they will be performing in next. They should congratulate competitors on a good performance after the round ends, and make friends during downtime. They should be gracious, and keep criticisms of other performers to themselves, even if someone else tries to start a negative conversation.

Resources

A great source is *Interpretation of Literature—Bringing Words to Life* by Travis Kiger and Ganer Newman. They cover cutting, characterization, blocking, and the structure of a story. Additionally, if this is your first time doing Duo Interpretation, go watch a final round of Duo! Observe the rounds not only as entertainment, but keep your eyes peeled for effective cutting, characterization, and blocking. Ask yourself, how can I apply similar techniques to my performance? How can I build off of what this duo is doing? The best way to learn Duo, outside of actively doing it, is by watching and learning from other performers.

Once you join the Association and register on our website, you can access the textbook, final rounds, and more at www.speechanddebate.org/resources. Use the filter function on the left hand side of the page to find resources specific to Interp and Duo Interp. 